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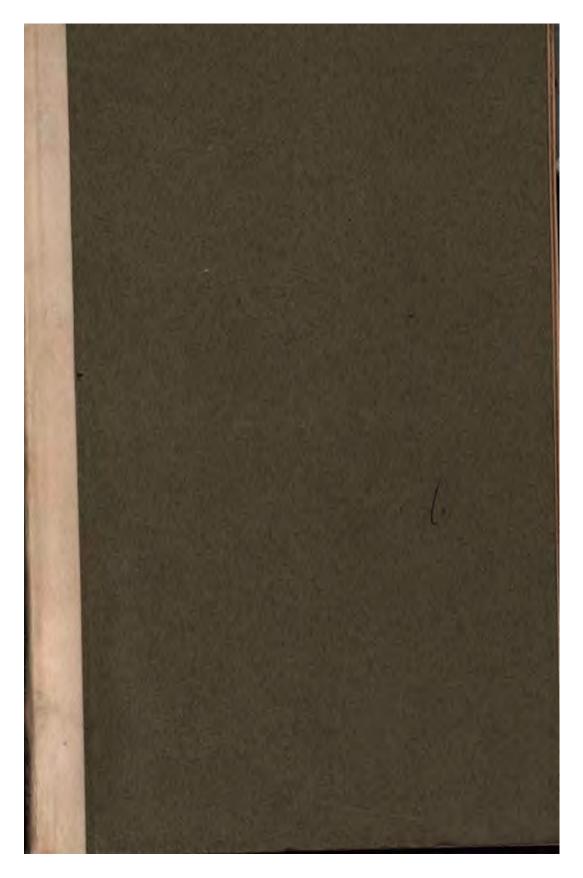
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LETTER

TO THE

ELECTORS OF STROUD,

ON THE

PRINCIPLES OF THE REFORM ACT,

BY

LORD JOHN RUSSELL.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
RIDGWAY, PIGCADILLY.
HDCCCCCCCCCC.

AN LIER STA

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LETTER.

GENTLEMEN.

Had I been apprehensive of the loss of your good opinion, from the assiduous attempts to deprive me of it, I should have found, long before this time, abundant reasons for addressing you.—
More than a year ago, the Political Union of Birmingham endeavoured, by printed misrepresentations, to induce you to declare that I had lost your confidence, and that it ought to be transferred to a disciple of their own school of politics. Soon after this, the Anti-Slavery Delegates sent a special mission to induce you to disturb the course which I had thought it my duty to take, as the member of a Government and of a Parliament whose faith were pledged by their own recorded acts.

Besides these formidable bodies, a gentleman of some talents for mischief, has lately undertaken the task of persuading you that his unfitness to remain in the commission of the peace is a proof of his fitness to become your representative.

These repeated efforts however have had, as I am told, scarcely a perceptible effect, and I should not think it worth while to interrupt the duties in which I am engaged, for the purpose of removing illusions which your own good sense must dispel.

Another, and as I think, more cogent reason, induces me to address you. The public mind is shaken by disputes and urged on by declamation relating to the Reform Act. From that Act your electoral privileges are derived. Upon that Act the present constitution of the House of Commons To that Act, seven years ago, the general is based. and willing consent of the country was given. Before it is repealed, and especially before it is exchanged for a scheme hitherto indefinite and unexplained, it seems to me desirable that some one connected with the introduction of that plan of Reform, and who still adheres to its principles, should place the whole matter before those who will have ultimately to decide upon the important question, whether it is to be set aside as an experiment which has totally failed, and a new scheme of Representation set up in its place; or whether we may not found upon the Reform Act the amendments and improvements which all institutions from time to time require?

I have put the question thus, because, on the one side, the present Ministry and their friends have never pretended that amendments of the details of the Reform Act might not from time to time be required; and, on the other hand, it is obvious that nothing but a total failure of the endeavour then made to substitute representation for nomination,

would either persuade or justify the people of England in commencing a new struggle for the sake of a change of so extensive a nature as those that have been lately proposed to us.

It is not necessary, for my purpose, to place in the front of the argument the declaration made by Lord Grey and Lord Althorp, the organs of the Government in the two Houses of Parliament, that the Reform Bill was intended as a permanent settlement of a great constitutional question. On this head I may say a few words hereafter; but for the present I address myself to your position, and not to mine, and I wish you to consider, unconnected as you are with all that occurred previous to the enactment of the Reform Bill, whether it is for your interest and that of the country in general,whether it will tend to the prosperity of trade and industry,-whether it will promote that general sense of security, without which, no progress in wealth can be made, -whether it will promote the stability of those Institutions to which the great majority of us still cling,-to commence a new agitation for the sake of some new kind of Representation.

In discussing this, the first question upon which I shall touch, it will hardly be denied, I presume, that there are some Acts of a far more important nature than others, and that the Bill of Rights and the Acts of Union with Scotland and Ireland ought not to be altered so lightly as a law regulating the sale of beer, or fixing the districts for petty sessions of the peace. Of the former kind, for instance, is the

Act of Succession to the Crown of these realms.—Suppose some one had said, in 1722, "King George is ignorant of our language; he has no experience of a free government; no knowledge of this country; he has sanctioned the Septennial Act; the people are greatly discontented; it will be better to change the dynasty." It would surely have been sufficient answer, without discussing the personal merits of the Sovereign, to say, "The Act of Settlement is a very recent Act; the succession was a matter of great difficulty, and attended with imminent danger of civil war; we have happily seen it established: let us now, for a time at least, try if we cannot be happy and free under the House of Hanover."

Or, let us take a more homely illustration. —Go to a gentleman who has lately repaired his house; shew him a plan for altering the whole of it, with a number of finished drawings, and a beautiful view of the south front,—he may very probably say, "Many thanks, my good sir; but a few years ago, at great expence, and with much trouble, I had my house completely repaired; it has been greatly enlarged—new rooms have been added: for two years I could hardly sleep for the noise of the workmen. If I am to begin again, and to make, as you propose, the plan of my house Grecian instead of Gothic, I shall not know peace or comfort for the rest of my life: I must decline your obliging offer."

Thus it is with many great as well as minor

matters. Thus it is that although many persons think the Roman Catholic Relief Act faulty in some of its provisions, and that the prolix oath it imposes, might well be exchanged for a simple oath of allegiance, and although many others are of opinion that the Act has done great mischief, and not fulfilled the expectations held out by its promoters, yet there is no party which proposes in Parliament either the repeal, or any considerable alteration of that Act. Thus it is also that no one proposes to pull down Buckingham Palace, or to rebuild Regent Street on a new plan, though many an architect is ready with drawings and elevations, to shew how we might improve the comfort, and increase the beauty both of palace and street.

Yet it may be, after all, that the Reform Act is so full of defects, that it is based on principles so false, that it has so entirely failed in securing representation to the people, that we ought to begin anew, and to lose no time in declaring to the world that the experiment has failed. For the purpose of forming an opinion upon this question, it will be advisable to consider what was the ancient scheme which was overturned, and what are the principles which pervade the Reform Act of 1832.

In proposing a reform of the representation of the people it always appeared to me, that there were two things to be proved; the one was, that the Members of the House of Commons did not individually represent the people; the other, that collectively, they did not speak the sense of the people.

Had the first branch of this argument failed, there was an end of the question. But it did not and could not fail; on the contrary, it was admitted that peers and other proprietors, named without controul, at their own caprice, a great proportion of the Members of the House of Commons. Accordingly, when I once moved for a committee to ascertain the facts respecting the nomination boroughs, Mr. Canning said it was unnecessary, the guilt was admitted; the facts alledged were not denied.

There remained, however, the other portion of the question, Did the House of Commons virtually represent the people? For if the people were in effect represented, why should sober men resort to an extensive change merely to introduce a theoretical improvement from which no practical advantage was to be derived?

It was therefore necessary to shew that in fact, the decisions of the House of Commons were not in conformity with the general sense of the people. In order to do this, I contrasted the votes of the small borough members, with those of the representatives of counties and large cities upon several important questions. The result was, that the known representatives of the people were in direct opposition to the majority of the House of Commons.

Thus cautiously did it appear to me necessary to proceed in laying the foundations for a change so important, and so pregnant with consequences of future felicity or woe.

These considerations were likewise deserving of deliberate attention, when a plan of Reform was at length to be proposed to Parliament by the authority of the Crown. Nomination was to be replaced by representation, and the House of Commons was to be so modelled, as in future to be deserving of the confidence, and a mirror of the sentiments of the people. With this view, there were several leading questions to be considered. They were,

I. The places by which Members were to be returned.

II. The franchise which was to entitle electors to

III. The mode of election.

With respect to the first of these questions, there were several courses open to us:

- 1. To retain all the boroughs, entitled by law to return members, admitting the inhabitants to vote.
- 2. To take one member from a certain number of boroughs, leaving one to be returned in the former mode.
- 3. To abolish only a few of the nomination boroughs.
- 4. To divide the country into districts of equal population.

- 5. To disfranchise a considerable number of boroughs, and give their share in the representation to large counties, and populous commercial towns.
- 1. The objection to the first of these plans, which had been suggested a short time before the dissolution of the former Ministry, was that it would give the right of returning Members to a number of small decayed villages which could not have furnished a sufficient body of electors—Not only Gatton and Old Sarum, but such places as St. Mawes and Higham Ferrers would have been in appearance as absurd, and in practice as corrupt, as any parts of the old system. This plan, moreover, would have left no room for the entrance of the great marts of industry and wealth, without a large increase of the numbers of the House.
- 2. The plan of taking one Member from 100 boroughs had been since 1822 proposed by myself, as a plan respecting ancient right, and at the same time admitting the modern realities of the country. But it would have left nomination boroughs to struggle with their new partners from Manchester and Leeds, without any other defence than an abandoned theory and a weakened title. Besides, that which was expedient in 1822, was no longer expedient in 1830. The stream had been dammed up till it had swelled to an inundation.
- 3. The plan of abolishing only a few of the smaller boroughs was liable to nearly the same

objection as the first plan. When an architect begins to uncover the timbers of an old building, he often finds so many of them unsound, that he is obliged to take away much more than he originally intended:—So it was with the small boroughs: it was generally supposed that only a few could deserve utter disfranchisement; but no such scheme would have satisfied public expectation, or could have had a chance of permanency.

4. The plan of removing the entire edifice of our representation and re-forming it anew, had been proposed by Lord Durham in 1821. Notwithstanding such high authority, when a Reform Bill was to be proposed with the sanction of the Crown, and under the responsibility of Government, this scheme was liable to serious, and as I think, fatal objections.

Let us suppose, for instance, as the exact numbers are not of importance, that two Members were allotted to every 50,000 of the population

The first difficulty that occurs is, that the Metropolis would send upwards of fifty members. Nor could this number be diminished by any allegation that the inhabitants of London were inferior to those of any part of the country in wealth or intelligence. Yet the representation of the capital although exceedingly just in the moderate proportions in which the Reform Bill sanctioned it, could not have been carried to the supposed extent without obvious disadvantage.

In speaking of such a plan Lord Grey spoke of it

as "the revision of the whole constituent body of the kingdom, and division of the country into departments, a mode which is liable to the greatest possible objections, to objections of such a nature that I will not trouble myself or your Lordships by attempting to enumerate them."*

But although Lord Grey very wisely abstained from enumerating objections to a plan which neither he nor his hearers thought of proposing, it is worth while now, when anomaly and inequality are so vehemently complained of, to state some of the objections to regularity and uniformity in a scheme of representation.

It must strike every observer, even if the ground had been clear, that in a country where there exists every variety of interest, every diversity of profession, where wealth is not confined to one class—the landed, manufacturing, or commercial,—where ingenuity has done its utmost,—and civilization is so extremely artificial; that it is nearly, if not altogether impossible by one uniform plan, to give an adequate representation of the nation at large. What more different than Dover, Canterbury, and the country between them? Would they be satisfied to form one department?

It was another and still more obvious objection to such a plan that all the towns in the country, except the largest, would have been diluted into the country around them. If inequality was to be

^{*} Hansard, October 3, 1831.

remedied, Northampton, Warwick, Southampton, Chichester, &c. &c. would have lost their distinctive character, and the minority of such towns would have been converted into a majority by the aid of the country gentlemen and farmers of the neighbourhood. If equality was to be the rule, if Dartmouth and Richmond were not to return Members alone, so neither on such principles could Dorsetshire or Lincolnshire submit to be outweighed by towns of 10 or 12,000 inhabitants-if numbers alone were to be considered, why should Devonshire, with 450,000 people, have no more representatives than Halifax and Wigan with 50,000? Yet had this equal division been adopted, Bridport, inclosed in a part of Dorsetshire, would probably have sent a Tory country gentleman in the place of Mr. Warburton, and the department of Lincoln would have replaced Sir Edward Bulwer by one who would have harmonized better with the Tory part of his constituents.

I see, that it is supposed by some that the large and moderate sized towns might keep their Members, leaving to the counties only their present share in the representation; but if inequality is to be abolished, the new principle to be put in its place must be pushed to its conclusion—the landed interest must be allowed to benefit if they are compelled to suffer by its application.

The proposal of such a scheme, therefore, would have been met by the resistance of nearly all the old boroughs returning Members to Parliament.

But let us ask a further question. What are the requisites you seek for in a representation of the people? That the wants and the wishes, the interests, and the opinions, the intelligence and the virtue of the nation may be fairly, freely, and fully represented.

To many a man this may seem a very easy task. He would cut the country into squares, or circles, or oblongs, giving a certain amount of population to each portion, and fixing the franchise as his taste, or philosophy might direct. The task would not be accomplished. It will be granted to me, I trust, that the knowledge and the intelligence of those most remarkable for knowledge and intelligence ought to be represented. But it may very well happen that while your division into districts secures representation to landed proprietors, to wealthy manufacturers, to eminent merchants, to busy and active popular leaders, it will exclude the eminent barrister who has given his time and labour to reach the eminence of his profession; to the political economist who has neither riches to buy votes, nor eloquence to attract them; to the gallant officer who is better known to his country's enemies than to the club or committee who furnish candidates for parties and districts. This would be more particularly the case in times of strong popular excitement, when nothing but wealth, local influence, or long established political character could weather the storm. The consequences would be serious. The House of Commons, though composed of able and stirring men, would not obtain the respect of the more intelligent part of the country. Men would look in vain for several of those leading counsel in our courts of law, those distinguished admirals, those gallant generals, those able writers, whose name has given a lustre to the House of Commons, and made the eyes of all turn towards it as the depositary of what was able, and eminent, and distinguished in law no less than in politics, alike in war, in letters, and in commerce.

I have drawn no fanciful picture. The House of Representatives in the United States is a direct representation of a great people; it is a body frequently renewed, and speaking as the organ of a nation, who admit no sovereign or superior; still it is the ambition of every man of ability to be a Member of the Senate; travellers who go the United States, all return impressed with the gravity, the eloquence, the knowledge of business which prevail in the Senate; citizens of the United States are far more proud of their Senate than they are of their House of Representatives.

You see therefore that it is not enough to have frequent elections—a most extensive suffrage—and even secrecy of vote to secure the first place in the regard and respect of a free Nation.

Let us now look at home, and see whether some of the circumstances to which I have alluded may not apply. The House of Lords has very little resemblance to the American Senate—but it has two circumstances in common with it, and which are in some degree cause and effect. Its Members have greater permanence than the Commons, and it attracts within its sphere many of the ablest men in the nation: in law the office of Chancellor makes this inevitable—in war, 'a peerage or Westminster Abbey', was the aspiration of a great commander. Look at the Lords' Debates of the present day:—the Duke of Wellington, Lord Brougham, Lord Lyndhurst, Lord Cottenham, Lord Denman, Lord Abinger, Lord Ripon, Lord Wharncliffe, Lord Fitzgerald, all had seats in the House of Commons, and have esteemed it an honour to be transferred from thence to the House of Lords.

Now it is a principle not to be neglected, that constitute these assemblies as you may, the display of great talent in debate, the authority of a great name, the lustre of arms, and the weight of long experience bring with them, in calm and quiet times that power of opinion, which, according to an Italian author is "the Queen of the world." Let us examine of what elements some parts of this opinion consist. In a country such as England now is, there are thousands of men who do not call themselves politicians, but who nevertheless are acute political observers. One may be employed all the morning in literary history, another planning a new railway, a third writing to his mercantile correspondents at New York, a fourth arguing a cause in a court of law. Yet to all these men

the newspaper has its attractions—the last debate has been a matter of interest, and it is not because his business lies elsewhere, that the man of speculative or practical ability is the less qualified to judge of those who discuss and decide on the interest of the Nation. To these men as well as to the people in general, an appeal lies. We can no longer have an awful Senate, even if we desired itthe Reporters in the gallery unveil the mystery of Government, and the House of Commons must rely upon its own qualities for maintaining public respect. If then it were found that the whole tone of debate was unworthy of the occasion, that the talent out of the House despised the talent within the House; that men of wit and men of business saw among them the most eminent men of the Nation, unable or unwilling to sit in the House of Commons, neither its popular title nor its well won privileges, nor its mighty authority would prevent it from sinking in public estimation. But if you add to this, that it would have to contend in the presence and perhaps in rivalry, with a House of Lords, which according to Mr. Roebuck, -no partial witness-has a moral influence in the Country, you would expose the House of Commons to a gradual process of sinking, from which it could only rescue itself by some desperate struggles, in the course of which its natural strength and vigour might more easily enable it to pull under water its more favoured companions, than to keep itself buoyant

on the stream. For these reasons among others, a division into departments seemed to me liable "to the greatest possible objections."

5th. The plan proposed took away about 150 seats from the smaller Boroughs; totally abolished more than 50 of these Boroughs, and distributed the larger portion of these seats among the great counties, and populous towns of the United Kingdom.

The first recommendation of this plan, in the eyes of the country, was that it entirely destroyed those nomination Boroughs which made the representation a by-word among the people.

It was remarked also that while it had this obvious advantage, it also retained to the greater part of the representation which remained the benefit of prescription. I remember Sir James Mackintosh speaking to me one day of a class of writers of the school of Mr. Bentham, said: "They all argue in favour of utility, and against prescription; but they forget that prescription is also a part of utility."

When the object was to make a change, great in extent and practical effect, without loosening the frame of society, it was a matter of no light importance that the greater number of places which were thereafter to send members, should be the same to which the eye was familiar, and of which the sound was known, and whose claims had long been recognized by the King's writ, and the statutes of the realm. It is to this probably that we owe the very early reconciliation of the numerous and

powerful opponents of Reform to the system by which that Reform is established. Had we left considerable towns irritated by disfranchisement, the seeds of complaint and dissatisfaction would have been left in the ground to grow up into noxious weeds upon our soil.

It was another and more obvious merit that while so much respect was shewn to prescription, the new claims of wealth and commerce were not overlooked. When reform was first seriously urged towards the close of the American War, the prevalent notion among Reformers was that a large addition should be made to the Knights of the Shire. It was in opposing such a reform that Lord North said, with his usual wit and good humour, "While some with Lear are for one hundred Knights, and others with Goneril for fifty, I say, with Regan, "What need of one?""

But since that time the importance of our manufacturing districts had rapidly and wonderfully increased. Their absence was, therefore, a prominent blot in our representative system, and which the enemies of Reform had to the last refused to remove.

The following places connected with Trade and Commerce obtained a share in the Representation by the Reform Act.

Manchester. Birmingham.
Leeds. Sheffield.
Sunderland. Devonport.
Wolverhampton. Bolton.

Bradford. Halifax.

Macclesfield.

Stockport.

Ashton under Lyne. Dudley.

Gateshead. Huddersfield.

Whitehaven.

Metropolitan Districts.

Greenwich.

Marylebone.
Tower Hamlets.

Blackburn.

Stroud.

Oldham.

Bury

Frome.

Whitby.

Stoke upon Trent.

Finsbury.

II. The next point of main importance was the right of voting. Here, as in the former question, the Reform Bill kept in view the ancient principles of the Constitution, and the rights established by prescription, rather adding to those ancient rights the new claims of the present age than sweeping them all away, to put in their place either a fanciful model, or a copy of some foreign constitution.

The 40s. freeholder was retained in counties, but the copyholder of 10l. a-year, and the lease-holder for a long term were allowed the franchise to which the similarity of tenure, or the amount of interest entitled them. The distinction between a permanent estate as a qualification for voting in counties and occupation with residence for voting in cities and boroughs was preserved in the first Reform Bill. No one denied to the new electors for

counties the validity of their claim. With respect to cities and boroughs, ancient legal authorities and the celebrated Glanville Committee had affirmed, that when not otherwise defined or restricted, the right of voting was and ought to be in resident householders paying scot and lot. But the character of the householder which had formerly been synonymous with that of an independent burgess had greatly altered in the lapse of time. And in many of our boroughs the mere potwallopers were among the lowest and most venal electors.

The limitation to occupiers of houses and warehouses of the value of 10*l*. a-year was therefore at once in conformity with ancient principle, and the lessons of recent experience.

The franchise indeed was objected to by the opponents of the Bill, as carrying too low the possession of the elective trust. The general view entertained by them of the franchises retained and conferred, may be gathered from the following extracts, from the protest of the House of Lords, signed by the Duke of Wellington, the King of Hanover, the Duke of Gloucester, sixty-four other peers, one archbishop, and six bishops.

"A preponderating influence in the election of the House of Commons is conferred upon the lowest class of inhabitants in towns — thus virtually closing the doors of the House of Commons to the vast monied and colonial interests, and leaving but few opportunies of admission to the heads of the great commercial body."

"The landed interest, notwithstanding the professed intention of giving to it an increase of representation, commensurate with that given to the great towns, is left exposed, even in the elections for counties, to the influence of the trading and manufacturing classes of the very places which are themselves to return Members to Parliament,—an influence so great as must leave in many instances, the representation of counties, and divisions of counties in the power of voters from the towns." Such was the foresight of the opponents of the Reform Bill!

III. The mode of election had been long complained of. Elections in counties lasting fifteen days gave dreadful note of preparation for expense and corruption. One election alone cost £300,000. In boroughs, the practice of paying rates in order to qualify the scot and lot voters to give their votes was a continual source of bribery. In order to remedy these evils, the Reform Bill provided the means of keeping a Register of Voters, enacted that rates should be paid by the day of registration, instead of the day of election, and afforded facilities by means of which no election in England or Scotland could be prolonged beyond the second day.

Such was the general nature of the Reform Bill. In stating the reasons upon which it was founded, I have given those which were either obviously to be deduced from its provisions, or such as at one time or other influenced my own mind. I do not pretend that every member of the Government which became responsible for it was influenced by the same considerations.

It passed into a law with several changes in its provisions, and some deviations from its original A vote of the House of Commons exprinciples. tended the franchise for counties to 50%, tenants at will, on the ground that they were as worthy of the franchise as 10l. tenants in towns. This I have always considered an error. If, in order to preserve the difference of tenure between counties and boroughs the 40s. freeholder was to be maintained, the 50l. occupiers should not have been admitted -if on the other hand, the respectability of this class of persons was to be the ground of admission, then the principle should have been carried to its full length,-for no one could maintain that if occupation were to be the foundation of the right, a 101. occupier in the counties was not as respectable as the 10l. occupier in the town. This, however, was a provision introduced by the Commons against the wish of the Ministers; it met a ready acceptance by the Lords, and became a part of the Act.

Another alteration was the retention of the freemen, introduced in order to conciliate some who objected to the first Reform Bill, and obtain support to its second reading in the Lords. Here again was a change for the worse. If the freemen exercised the franchise corruptly, one of two courses should properly have been taken. The one to disfranchise them altogether,—a proposal in which they at first seemed ready to acquiesce. The other, and perhaps the better course would have been, to have treated the freemen in the same spirit in which other rights had been treated.

The freemen of old evidently represented the toil and the industry—the mechanical skill and trading substance of the communities of our towns: they do so no longer.

It might have been difficult—but it was not impossible to make the freemen the proper representatives of one of the most valuable classes of the community—that of the industrious, intelligent, and able mechanics who abound in our great manufacturing and commercial towns, and some of whom only are now admitted to the right of voting. Such a change in the character of freemen would do much to purify our elections, and strengthen the House of Commons.

Having laid before Parliament the nature and the grounds of this vast change, the Prime Minister, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as the organs of the Government, declared in the name of that Government, that it was intended as the permanent settlement of a great constitutional question.—Without disputing on the words, "final measure," still less on "finality," which is no term of theirs or of mine, I will give you their reported

words on two or three of the many occasions on which they declared their adherence to reform, and their hostility to perpetual change.

Let us first hear Lord Althorp in the Commons.

"He had every reason to hope, from the satisfaction it had already given, that the change that they had proposed would be permanent. He did not see that any of the grounds that His Right Honourable friend had stated, in order to shew that it would not be permanent, were likely to raise discontent in the country."

"He had every reason to hope that the Bill would inspire the people with confidence in their Representatives; and if so, they would not call hereafter, as they had called lately, for a large and important change."*

"Then, as to the permanency of the measure, surely there would be less permanency if a small change only were introduced; and if, as some Honourable Gentlemen hold, the people desire more than this measure, and will not be satisfied, except by going the whole length of Universal Suffrage, this is a tolerably strong argument, that they will not be satisfied with less than the measure now proposed. But it appears to me that the good sense of the people of England will be satisfied when they see that the crying evil of the present system will be then got rid of, and that they will have their proper influence in the representation of the

^{*} Parliamentary Debates, September 21, 1831.

country. I am sure that the people of this country are not so fickle as to give reason to apprehend that when they have no practical evil to complain of, they will still wish for change for the sake of change itself. It has been truly said, that what this country requires is quiet, and a cessation from anxiety and agitation; and I consider this Bill as the most effectual means for attaining that object."*

Lord Grey.

"It has been said, that a measure of a more contracted nature than this would have satisfied the people. I doubt whether in such a state of things as the present, this could have been reasonably expected. It seemed to me that permanent contentment could only be produced by a decisive and extensive measure; and the object which the King's Government had in view, was to produce such a settlement of this long agitated question as might prevent its being brought into renewed discussions in those seasons of distress and difficulty when experience has shewn that it has constantly revived, calling into action all the elements of political division and discontent. It surely was desirable, if this question was to be entered into at all, it should be done in such a manner as to afford a hope that it might be effectually and permanently adjusted."†

^{*} March 19, 1832.

⁺ Parliamentary Debates, 3rd Series, Vol. viii. p. 334.

Again-

"I felt that the most prudent and safest measure of Reform would be a bold one, because, when I looked at the condition of the country—when I considered how just the claims of the people were—and when, above all, I reflected upon the absolute necessity of satisfying the respectable and reasonable part of the community, in order that thereby the Government and Legislature might be furnished with a ground on which a firm and safe stand might be made in defence of the principles of the Constitution, if ever they should be really assailed,—from all these considerations, I say, I was satisfied that nothing but a bold and decisive measure would give such general satisfaction and content as would set the question at rest."*

If, after these declarations, any member of Lord Grey's cabinet were to propose to begin the whole question anew, the obvious remark would be, "You have either so egregiously deceived us that we cannot trust to your public engagements, or you have so blindly deceived yourself that we cannot believe in the solidity of your new scheme."

But it is said that all things are liable to change; that no human measure is final; that no supposed engagement ought to stand in the way of the interests and desires of the people. To all this I can readily agree; as readily as the Welsh curate, when he found his cassock out at elbows, consoled himself with reflecting on the revolutions of empire, and the mutability of the world. A great deal of common-place is thrown away in proving what nobody disputes; the question remains, is it necessary for the good of the people to begin anew the task of reforming the representation of the people?

The only proof that has yet been given of such necessity is the loudness of complaint. But let us mark from whom this complaint proceeds, how it arises, and to what it tends.

Much of this sullenness against the Reform Bill, if not the greater part, arises from those who never were satisfied with its provisions, and only looked upon it as the precedent and promise for future changes.—They are consistent in their desire for a New Reform Bill, though hardly candid in declaring their disappointment at results which they always expected.

Another portion of the discontented consists of those who looked upon the Reform Bill as the epoch of the triumph of the Liberal party, and the extinction of their adversaries. I never entertained such partial expectations nor such unjust desires.

In scanning the general scope of the Bill with Lord Althorp, we always concluded that the Tory party were a party too deeply rooted in the property of the country to be thus destroyed, and that when the warmth of enthusiasm for Reform should somewhat subside, they would have as fair a prospect as any party, of obtaining a majority in the Reformed House of Commons. We endeavoured to deprive the Tories of their undue power to overbear the opinion of the nation, not to proscribe them should the national voice be raised in their favour.

A third class of the discontented, and a very numerous one, consists of those who expected from reform, what reform could not accomplish. I am no believer in the doctrine,

> How small, of all the ills that men endure, The part that kings or laws can cause or cure.

I think, on the contrary, that many social and moral evils are to be attributed to the institutions of Government, and the laws by which a community is ruled. But laws and institutions must act gradually and generally in order to be beneficial. I have seen a popular assembly decree a democratic constitution which did not give any man a larger share of liberty or security than he had before enjoyed under an arbitrary king. Habits must be changed; laws must be respected as well as enacted; the minds of men must be engaged to a willing conformity with the new order of the State.

I am persuaded that the Reform Act is working gradually a great and useful change.—That change, to be permanent and extensive, must not destroy and extinguish, but alter and improve the Tory party. It was one of the worst effects of the borough system that it separated the power of the

ruling party from connexion with the people. Since it has been overthrown the members of the defeated party have been endeavouring to carry the people with them. These attempts have been alloyed by the old vices of the borough system—intimidation—corruption—and flattery to prejudices rather than address to reason. But as the people rise higher in the scale those who court their support most adapt themselves to their improved character. The means of influence will be elevated in proportion to the intelligence and self-respect of those to whom they are addressed.

I am sorry to see that many are influenced by the present state of parties in the House of Commons, and look no farther than to such a change as may again give the Liberal party a triumphant majority. The question really is, whether public opinion in England entitles them to a triumphant majority. That it entitles them to a larger proportion than they now have, I cannot, seeing the bribery and intimidation employed at the last election, entertain a doubt. But it is equally clear to me, that opinion on public affairs is at present very much divided, and that a House of Commons which should contain, in 1839, no greater a number of the Tory party, than the Whigs had in the unreformed Parliament of 1829, would as unfairly represent the people as the unreformed Parliament then did. The efforts of the Clergy to persuade the country that the measures of the

present Ministry respecting the Church of Ireland, and respecting Church rates, would shake and ultimately destroy Church property have had a considerable effect on the public mind. The violence of language used by some Reformers, and the natural inclination of mankind, after a powerful exertion, to pause before any further effort is made, have tended to inaction and quiescence. To this is to be added the innate strength of the Tory party, which, as Lord Bolingbroke truly observes, enables it to rise again after the most severe falls-the Clergy with their six millions of revenue diffused into every parish—the country gentlemen with their influence as men of property—as magistrates -and as residents on their estates-a considerable portion of the higher aristocracy—the professions of Army and Navy, as well as Church and Law, stocked during sixty years with the friends and followers of a Tory Government, all these things act in a quiet time, and when there is no one stirring question to induce men to forego their interests, and oppose their connexions.

Then again, it is said, when the means of carrying a new Reform Bill are questioned, that an excitement equal to that which carried the Reform Bill would be again raised by an announcement of Household Suffrage, Ballot and Triennial Parliaments.

I very much doubt the fact. Let it be remembered how strong that feeling was—so strong that in spite of the menaced disfranchisement of more than 150 seats, and the transfer of power from the patrons of many larger places, the old unreformed House gave on a dissolution a majority of upwards of 100 to the Ministry of Lord Grev. Is it expected that Sir William Molesworth's administration could obtain a similar result in the Reformed Parliament? I do not believe it-I am of opinion that on such an appeal as that of 1831 the popular feeling would be against the new Reform Bill. After the exertions then made the practical sense of the people is against a new agitation and a fresh suspension of the business of the country. The worst of all legislation for the tradesman and the farmer is that which disturbs the market, and spreads unceasing and undefined alarm.

Let it be remembered also that the enthusiasm in favour of the Reform Bill extended to all classes, agricultural, mercantile, and manufacturing. The necessity for a change is now urged very much on the ground that a repeal of the Corn Law might thereby be obtained. But the very cry which is your strength with one part of the country will be your weakness with another. It is as if a quack should invite every one to take a specific against drowsiness. The drowsy man might be induced to buy; but the patient who suffered from sleepless nights would throw the physic to the dogs.

But supposing a new enthusiasm could be awakened, I am not ready to stir the cauldron from which so potent a charm could be extracted. Of the numbers who require large changes many look to a new scheme of Representation for other purposes than those of good Government, and with expectations which cannot be realized.

Of the working classes who have declared their adherence to what is called the People's Charter, but few care for Universal Suffrage, Vote by Ballot, or Annual Parliaments. The greater part feel the hardship of their social condition; they complain of their hard toil and insufficient wages, and imagine that Mr. Oastler or Mr. Fielden will lead them to a happy valley, where their labour will be light, and their wages high. They know not the general laws by which profit and wages are regulated. They conceive that the tyranny of the rich is the cause of their depressed condition.

A new Reform Bill, whether the suffrage were Household, or Universal, would do nothing towards the cure of evils which belong to a populous country, and varying employment. But the excitement of a new change; the passions again raised; the House of Commons again in the furnace to be melted in a new mould; the people again in the temper which burst out in flames at Nottingham and Bristol, would go far to shake the stability of property, and make Law the servant of Disorder. The happy consummation of a labouring class toiling little and earning much would be further than ever; the security to be enjoyed in Germany or Swit-

zerland would attract capital and diminish employment at home; the deluded might indeed wake from their dream at length, but too late for their peace.

The Reform Act was carried under the auspices of Lord Grey, assisted by statesmen long used to power, and able to weigh their proceedings. That weight of authority carried along with it a large proportion of the House of Lords, and the dispassionate Reformers throughout the country. But for a new Reform Bill opposed by a majority in the House of Commons, and five-sixths of the House of Lords, no such authority could be invoked. It would be menace, and the multitude; unknown leaders dictating to intelligence and property; an attempt at Reform, but sure to end in confusion.

A Magistrate in Wiltshire in an address to his labourers, lately issued, put the case of a capital of 30,000*l*. invested in a work which employed 1000 workmen, and asked whether if each were to obtain 30*l*. a piece, and the work to be abandoned, their condition would be improved.

But even this is more than the unfortunate victims would probably obtain. Of a capital of 30,000*l*. now employed in manufactures, it is probable that three-fourths would be destroyed, or wasted by a revolution against property.

It is said that upon these subjects the Ministry are in accordance with the Tories, and that the doctrine of Sir Robert Peel can hardly be that in which a Reformer ought to agree.

Surely resistance must commence somewhere; and wherever it does commence, those who call themselves Conservatives, must vote with the party of resistance.

Let us suppose a general election at which Mr. Grote should be placed at the head of the poll in the City of London, and that his friends and partisans should have such a majority as to induce the Crown to form a Ministry in which he should be Chancellor of the Exchequer, and leader of the Ministerial party in the House of Commons. In such a House we should probably have motions made to deprive holders of sinecures of their life incomes; to reduce the dividend to the national creditor, and other plans of similar tendency. -Mr. Grote, with his strong sense of justice, and his knowledge of the true principles of public faith. would oppose all such schemes. Sir Robert Peel would ably support the Minister, and I should humbly aid in the same cause. But then we should have the Ministry receiving the support of the Tories; deserted by their own friends among the extreme Radicals, and the country brought to that lamentable and unexampled condition, in which, according to the opinion of those extreme politicians, there would be "neither a Liberal Ministry, nor a Liberal opposition."

There are doubtless many defects in the Reform Act which require to be remedied. The £10 fran-

chise is too much fettered by regulation; the annual registration is made a source of vexation and expence; the freemen might be made the pride of the working classes instead of their opprobrium. But changes such as these, introduced when the public mind was prepared for them, and the proposals had been duly weighed, differ entirely from the proposal to found a new Reform Bill on the basis of Triennial Parliaments, Household Suffrage, and Vote by Ballot.

We are desired to take these changes together.— I told you at my election not to expect that I should vote in favour of Ballot. I have expressed in Parliament the opinion that Ballot alone would not satisfy the people at large. Some rebuked me for mixing two questions altogether distinct; and some among my friends voted for Ballot, determined not to consent to an extension of the suffrage. It was with some satisfaction, therefore, that I saw in the Morning Chronicle, of March 25th of the present year, this manifesto:—

"Our first point of union is the Ballot. But the Ballot, combined with the present limited franchise, and in the present, which is likely to be the permanent, temper of the disfranchised, would be an unendurable anomaly. It would aggravate the existing breach between the middle and the working classes."

Indeed! I entirely agree in this opinion. I believe if Ballot could be made effectual, those who have no votes would be far more discontented than they now are. Ballot is suited to an absolute Government of the few, or a free Government where the suffrage is universal.—The absolute aristocracy of Venice used it in its perfection; the people of the United States use it—it accords with their principle "that the majority is to govern." The will of the people of the United States is supreme; it has no check; and every one shares in the sovereignty. But for the middle classes of this country to pretend to an irresponsible and secret power over the destinies of the country, would be, as the Morning Chronicle says, "an unendurable anomaly."

But then Household Suffrage—on your principle you do not go far enough. Will the non-householders be satisfied? Are the working classes, not householders, ready to submit to their entire exclusion in favour of the householders? Will they not exclaim against the partiality? Will they not join in demanding that, with Vote by Ballot, Universal Suffrage is the only tolerable scheme?

Moreover, these words, Household Suffrage, do not explain the plan. Is the country to be divided into departments? If the middle sized towns are still to send members, Household Suffrage and Ballot will make them sinks of corruption. If not, will they bear to be swamped in the surrounding country? Before the people are excited to throw aside the Reform Act, these questions should be answered.

When it is said that the Reform Bill has been barren of fruit, I must ask you to reflect on the fol-

lowing short list of measures, passed into law, or sanctioned by the Crown, since the passing of the Reform Act.

1833.—Bill reducing ten Bishops in the Church of Ireland, and abolishing Church Cess in that country.

Abolition of Slavery in the colonies of Great Britain and Ireland.

Trade with China thrown open.

1834.—Poor Laws Reformed; a measure of vital importance to the present and future generations.

1835.—Municipal Corporations subjected to popular election and control.

1836.—Dissenters allowed to marry according to their own forms and doctrines.

General Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages.

Tithes Commuted for a rent-charge, on terms useful for agriculture, and equitable to the clergy.

1837.—The Session interrupted by the death of William the Fourth; still, the Criminal Law was improved, and capital punishments greatly reduced.

1838.-Irish Poor Law.

Irish Tithe Act.

To say that those who have passed all these measures since the 1st of January, 1833, have been doing nothing, may be a favourite assertion of Ultra-Tories and Ultra-Radicals; but it is surely as strong a perversion of fact as party violence ever broached.

Let us add to these measures-

Taxes reduced not less than six millions.

Commercial Treaties signed with Austria, Turkey, &c.

The affairs of Belgium amicably arranged by the allied endeavours of Europe.

Peace maintained, and the influence of England upheld in every quarter of the globe.

And when these results are weighed, it may well be asked, whether the Reform Act has justified either the forebodings of that party which represented it as fatal to peace, order and security; or whether it confirms the invectives of those who regard it as a total failure, and ask you to attempt some other scheme, not as a more complete and satisfactory settlement, but as the commencement of a series of experiments upon our Constitution, of which the end is veiled in gloom and obscurity.

Although I must leave many parts of the subject untouched, yet there is one, so closely connected with the operation of the Reform Act, that I should be wanting in frankness, were I not to allude to it. I mean the conduct of the House of Lords.

Mr. Canning was accustomed to put as a difficulty in the way of Reform, the question.—"What will you do with the House of Lords?"

This difficulty would have scarcely been felt had not Mr. Pitt and Lord Liverpool altered the character of that body. Before their time five new peerages were sufficient for half a reign. But with that disregard of all respect for the constitution which distinguished their administrations, they admitted to the House of Lords, hosts of persons remarkable chiefly for their adherence to the Minister of the day. Besides this twenty-eight peers were added from the peerage of Ireland, who represent only the stronger party among the peers of Ireland, just as one hundred peers of the United Kingdom, chosen by the Peers, would represent the stronger party among the Peers of the United Kingdom.

By such means the voice of the House of Lords became the voice of one party, predominant at the time, an evil which to all appearance nothing could remedy but a similar excess at another time, in favour of the party then predominant.

The Reform Bill was carried by an expedient less justifiable. The private Secretary of the King wrote a letter to the Peers in opposition, requesting their absence from the House of Lords, while a bill of the highest importance to the country was passing through its various stages; a precedent of the highest danger, which nothing but the respect felt by both parties for the person of the Sovereign, could have induced them to permit.

Since the Reform Act passed the difficulty foreseen by Mr. Canning has been felt, but, till latterly, in no aggravated shape. For a time the Government forbore to press upon that body measures conflicting with their known opinions. For a time the genius and wisdom of the Duke of Wellington have kept within their entrenchments the superior forces which serve under his command. But year by year the Commons grow more impatient at the frustration of measures on which they have laboured for many a weary night-which contain nothing revolutionary or intemperate—and which are dispatched before dinner by some thirty peers, who without reading the bills, and without listening to explanation, mar the fruits of a session. Year by year also the Lords, strong in their numbers, grow more and more eager for increased boldness of attack, and for decisive battle. The Duke of Wellington has now a harder task than that which he performed in the vigour of his age. I have seen that great man, at the head of an army which panted for action, decline victory, and look to the success-not of the day, nor even of the campaign-but of the war. In these civil campaigns, however, the right wing is not led by so prudent and discreet a second as Lord Hill; and the light troops are continually attempting to hurry on a general action.

With these dispositions the superiority of the Lords in all matters of government may one day be asserted, or England may no longer bear the double sway of Government in one House, and opposition in the other. Who are in that case to give the victory? Evidently the people of the United Kingdom. The House of Commons must carry their mea-

sures by popular support, or be dissolved and give place to an assembly more congenial to the Lords.

In this state of affairs it has been my wish that the Commons should ask, not only for what was right in itself, but what the people would feel to be right. For instance, could we have contended longer for the Appropriation Clause? With a small majority in the Commons with us, the people of England were not favourable, and the people of Ireland had grown indifferent. The only effect of protracting the struggle would have been that many an unfortunate farmer would have been yearly sent to prison, some lives would have been yearly sacrificed, some clergymen yearly suffered great distress, and the tithes would in the end have been paid by the landlord, without the deduction of one-fourth of their amount.

The same may be said of other questions, on which the public mind is divided, or perhaps averse to measures that have been proposed.

But when certain measures of temperate amendment in our laws have the assent of the Commons and of the Country, it is quite just that the proposers and advocates of such improvements should be called upon to gain the assent of Parliament to them. Otherwise men will be driven in despair to become partisans of more extensive changes, which while they will be more popular will not appear at all more impracticable. Such is the danger of the course now pursued by the Lords, and such the

prospects before them. If they cannot be persuaded to adopt even such amendments of the Reform Act as to give a little further time to the rate-payer for the payment of his rates, if they cannot assent to any correction of the abuses of registration, and the defects of registration courts, if they cannot agree to give to Ireland the same municipal privileges as England, they will force many of those who have supported the Government in such plans to say that what has appeared to the Lords too much, is in their eyes too little.

This is a temper which I should be sorry to see prevail. Nor will it prevail if men of large property and moderate views among the Lords can agree in such a course of action as may satisfy fair expectation, and give to the country the spectacle of the two Houses labouring patiently and harmoniously to improve our defective legislation.

I know very well that it is a source of foolish triumph to some, to be able to say at the end of a session, "See how little these Ministers have done! Two-thirds of their measures have been rejected!"

The country will ask in the end, whether these measures were useful, and if so, why they have been rejected. They will enquire who they are, that have misused the power of legislation, to indulge a party spleen, and those on whom that charge justly rests, will be the losers in the conflict.

But I have already detained you too long. I have not had time to arrange and condense what I wished to address to you. But it has appeared

to me of urgent importance that the next steps to be taken, should not be taken without due reflection. I have found it impossible to express in any more usual form the sentiments which I entertain. It is for you to ponder seriously, in the spirit of that true Whiggism which has always animated you, on the dangers of the time, and the means by which they may be averted. I am persuaded you will not think of lifting the anchors of the monarchy while the signs of a storm are black in the horizon. I am convinced that you will not, in a moment of disappointment, deface the work which you have made. Great changes in law and government often make themselves more felt, as the distance of time, at which they were established, becomes more remote. Who can doubt that the subjects of George the Third enjoyed more fully the benefits of the Habeas Corpus Act than our ancestors did seven years after its enactment? I trust therefore you will persevere in upholding the Reform Act, and seek to derive from it its sure and fruitful results. rather than exhibit to the world a new warning against popular reforms, and give a new argument to the enemies of all popular institutions.

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